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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 BAGHDAD 000864

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SUBJECT: BAGHDAD HOSTS FIRST INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE SINCE
1990

REF: BAGHDAD 782

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Daniel Speckhard per 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: Key U.S. and Iraqi objectives were fulfilled, albeit imperfectly, at the March 10 expanded neighbors' conference in Baghdad. All of Iraq's neighbors expressed their support for Iraq's security and stability and pledged cooperation; all attended at respectably senior levels; and the MFA handled the logistical, protocol, and hospitality arrangements with proficiency. Although participants were not empowered to agree to a communiqu  as the Prime Minister had hoped, they did approve an expansive "chairman's statement" issued by the Foreign Minister that reflected the supportive statements participants had made during the conference. Participants expressed support for the Foreign Minister's proposal to create working groups to address security, refugee, and fuel import/electricity issues and agreed that the idea should be on the agenda for the ministerial. The Iraqis too quickly agreed to an Iranian "clarification" that only the neighbors could be members of the working groups; the Ambassador rescued the idea by gaining consensus that of course the working groups would be able to invite the participation of other regional or international experts.

¶2. (C) Summary Continued. The issue of the follow-on ministerial evoked the greatest debate. Iran insisted that it could not support any recommendation related to an expanded ministerial, since it had come to a "neighbors conference" and thus could only refer to a ministerial for the neighboring countries alone. The Egyptians pressed to host a follow on neighbors-only ministerial, and the Turks pressed to host a follow-on expanded neighbors ministerial. The Syrians came up with the winning compromise that would allow the Iraqi Foreign Minister to consult his counterparts on the way forward. No U.S. bilaterals took place with any party. The Ambassador broke the ice by shaking the hands of the entire Iranian delegation at the beginning of the event. Informal conversations related to the meetings' proceedings occurred between the U.S. participants and both the Syrian and Iranian participants. The next step is to persuade the Prime Minister to accept the Turkish and Egyptian offers, preferably in that order, to host follow up ministerials.

100 PER CENT PARTICIPATION

¶3. (C) Most of the out-of-town participants arrived via an Iraqi-chartered aircraft from Amman that unfortunately landed about an hour and a half late. The Turks and the Egyptians arrived via a Turkish aircraft. All of Iraq's neighbors attended. Only Iran and Syria sent Deputy Foreign Ministers, the others however were represented at respectably senior levels. The conference took place within the MFA, in the Red Zone. Security was tight. The Baghdad Operations Center, under command of LTG Abboud took the lead on security

arrangements, with oversight and some assistance from MNF. A large mortar landed within 100-200 meters of the MFA building during the meeting, shaking the participants for a few minutes, but they recovered their equanimity quickly.

¶4. (C) The Prime Minister opened the event with a welcoming speech that stressed his government's determination to administer the law even-handedly and to develop their country through democratic means. He called on Iraq's neighbors to assist in the fight against terrorism (text sent separately).

¶5. (C) After the Prime Minister departed, the participants headed to a conference room. Foreign Minister Hoshyar Zebari launched the discussion by recalling the decision in Tehran to hold the next ministerial in Baghdad. After realizing the difficulties of getting ministerial participation given the current security situation in Iraq, Zebari said he proposed the current meeting to prepare for the next ministerial, with the added Iraqi initiative of inviting the P-5. The only topic of the event would be Iraq. He spent a little time explaining the Baghdad Security Plan and his proposal to create working groups on security, refugees, and fuel import issues with the goal of developing practical solutions to these chronic problems. He said Iraq hoped to gain the participants agreement to a draft statement that he had circulated.

The Statements: Uniformly Supportive of Iraq

¶6. (C) As is the norm in such meetings, each participant gave a short statement. All expressed support for Iraqi stability and security and pledged cooperation. Highlights

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follow of some interventions in order of delivery.

Syria: Deputy Foreign Minister Arnoos noted the deterioration in security and rise in sectarian violence since the last neighbors' conference. He stressed that there is no military solution, only a political one. Military actions have failed. He said Iraq's future was in Iraqi hands and cooperation with neighboring Arab countries was important to keeping Iraq united. He recited a litany of Sunni issues: disband militias, reform the debaathification process, solve constitutional issues, bring back Iraqi officers to the Army or give them pensions, and set a timeline for withdrawal of foreign forces in agreement with the government of Iraq. He also called for helping the Iraqi refugees and urged support for reconstruction and a review of debts with the GOI.

Egypt: Hani Khallaf, Assistant Minister of Arab Affairs, expressed Egypt's desire to support and protect the Iraqi people. Egypt's presence was a strong message of support for the government of Iraq. He condemned all violence. He also urged disbanding militias and "bringing back" the Armed Forces on a non-sectarian basis, drawing support from foreign forces only when needed. Egypt supported all Arab League statements of support for Iraqi unity and offered to work with other Arab countries to mobilize national reconciliation in Iraq. He said Egypt was ready to host the next ministerial of the neighbors' conference.

Iran: After thanking the host, Deputy Foreign Minister (for Legal and International Affairs) Dr. Abbas Araghchi commended the Prime Minister's efforts to secure peace and stability. He said they were ready to "work hand-in-hand" to support the Government of Iraq and bring peace and tranquility to its citizens. He urged the continuation of cooperation among the neighbors and saw the current meeting as the "prelude to the ministerial for neighboring countries in Baghdad." He spoke of concerns about continuing violence alluding to "certain foreign and internal elements" who were sowing the seeds of sectarian violence. He said it was "critical" to set a

timetable for the withdrawal of foreign forces that were part of the problem, not the solution. He referred to a "vicious circle" where "occupation breeds insecurity, insecurity justifies occupation." Security should be handed over to the GOI--and the neighbors would help building the Iraqi security forces. He cited four years of Iranian neighborly support to Iraq, including recent decision to provide \$1 billion in loans for reconstruction. He complained of an "double standard" policy of the foreign forces who refused to deal with terrorists (meaning the MeK) operating from inside Iraq against neighboring countries, and that Iran expected Iraq to take the necessary measures. He also complained of those who were "leveling accusations against neighboring countries" and who were responsible for the detention/abduction of six diplomats, violating international conventions. He laid down a marker that the next ministerial should remain within the framework of the neighbors-only format. Enlargement did not help, although guests and observers were welcome. He proposed that the next ministerial be in Baghdad as agreed in Tehran.

Saudi Arabia: Dr. Prince Turki bin Mohammad bin Saud Al Kabeer expressed the conventional sentiments of support. He stressed Saudi Arabia's support for "one country of Iraq" as well as Saudi Arabia's agreement with the Arab League efforts on Iraq. Reconciliation required the participation of "all Iraqis," and he acknowledged that "other nations can help with peace and security in Iraq."

Turkey: Ahmet Oguz Celikkol, Special MFA Representative of Iraq, recalled that Turkey had hosted the first neighbors' meeting in 2003. He recited positive goals that Turkey sought for Iraq, including a democratic and broad-based government. He cited achievements of the Iraqi people. He called for a mechanism to cooperate better, for example on refugees. He made clear that there could be no division of Iraq along ethnic or sectarian lines. He insisted that the world would be watching the outcome of the meeting and urged acceptance of Turkey's offer to host the next enlarged ministerial including the P-5 in Istanbul in April and supported Egypt's offer to host the next neighbor's only meeting.

Arab League: Assistant Secretary General Ahmed bin Hilli recited the entire corpus of Arab League doctrine on Iraq, but most of the participants were distracted because of the nearby mortar strike that shook the windows and the room.

P-5: The Ambassador's intervention has been passed via email to the Department. He made last minute additions to counter the Iranian claim that the U.S. held Iranian diplomats. (Note: During lunch, the Iranians pressed Zebari to support

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their position on this issue. After lunch, Zebari tried to placate the Iranians by explaining to the participants some of the facts. He recalled that the U.S. had released Iranian diplomats once the GOI confirmed their diplomatic status. He explained that the facility in Erbil from which the Iranians were detained was not/not a consulate. He said that the GOI had formally requested that the U.S. release the Iranians and had been assured by the U.S. that effort to expedite the processing was underway. Zebari also noted that the sixth Iranian who was kidnapped was a diplomat and that the GOI was following that case closely.) The British Ambassador took note of the Turkish offer to host an expanded ministerial and recommended that it might be an opportunity to launch the International Compact as well. The Russians made positive remarks and aligned themselves with the Arab League 2005 statement. The French also made encouraging remarks about Iraq and French support for its transformation, but did call for a "clear definition of the time horizon for the departure of foreign troops." The Chinese expressed their support for including the P-5 in the next ministerial.

Getting to the Ministerial(s)

17. (C) The last two hours of the event focused on trying to agree on what the Chairman's statement would say with the regard to the follow on ministerial(s). (The entire text will be forward via email to Department once translation completed.) Those with fixed positions:

Iran: They wanted no reference at all to an expanded neighbors' conference. They claimed that they came to Baghdad to attend a preparatory meeting for a "neighbors conference" only and had no instructions to address an expanded ministerial. At one point during discussion, Araghchi said that "an expanded meeting is a good idea" but he had no mandate to decide on anything outside the neighbors only framework. (Note: Turkish representative Celikkol told USDEL on the sidelines that Iranian FM Motakki had already assured Gul that the Iranians supported the idea of an expanded neighbors conference in Istanbul. He was irritated with the "game" being played.) The Iranians staunchly supported the idea of holding the next neighbors' conference in Baghdad but agreed that the Iraqis could ultimately decide.

Egypt: They wanted to host the next neighbors' only event in Cairo and had agreed to support the Turkish offer of hosting an expanded ministerial in Istanbul.

Turkey: They wanted to host the expanded ministerial in Istanbul and had agreed to support the Egyptian offer as well.

Iraq: The Foreign Minister had, by necessity, to support holding the next ministerial in Baghdad, although privately he told the Ambassador he had no problem with the Turkish proposal. The Prime Minister, however, had yet to agree to any venue outside of Iraq. Thus Iraqi views could not be brought into play to resolve the matter. Zebari struggled to find a way out of the disagreement.

Syria: Deputy Foreign Minister Arnoos took a very pragmatic approach. He said Syria was ready to support the next neighbors ministerial although he questioned, but did not refuse, the participation of others. He did support moving forward to form working groups to start working on defining the problems in advance of the ministerial. He did stress that the working groups should be at the expert level, not political figures. The Syrians finally offered the language that all accepted and that prompted the Ambassador to state that "the U.S. supported the Syrian position 100%" --at which the entire conference erupted in laughter. The compromise made three points: it acknowledged that according to the last ministerial in Tehran, Baghdad still had the right to host; it noted both the Egyptian and Turkish offers; and it authorized the Iraqi FM to consult his colleagues on time, place, and participants.

Working Groups

18. (C) All participants supported the idea of working groups on security, refugees, and fuel imports. FM Zebari agreed, too quickly, to the Iranian "clarification" that only the neighbors could be members of these working groups. The Ambassador rescued the idea by stating that it would be only reasonable that the working groups would be able to invite the participation of others with expert knowledge of the issue. For example, the UN could help with refugee issues, and MNF-I would be a valuable participant in security working

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groups. No one objected to this further clarification.

US-Iranian-Syria Interactions

19. (C) No separate bilaterals occurred. U.S. interaction with the Syrian and Iranian delegations occurred within the main meeting room or lunch room and focused exclusively on the issues before the conference participants. For example, there was focused discussion between the Ambassador and S/I Satterfield and Araghchi, with the Egyptians and others in the huddle, on how to resolve the impasse on the ministerial. Overall, both the Syrian and Iranian delegations contributed to a constructive and professional atmosphere.
SPECKHARD